

**Jobs Listening Session**  
**January 8, 2011**  
**Helena, MT**

Health, Safety, Insurance – General Group 2

Opportunity Link is a nonprofit organization focused on systemic approaches to reducing poverty and promoting economic development in our eleven county, three reservation region located in northcentral Montana. This mandate has led us to undertake broad initiatives in support of low-income, working poor, disabled and geographically remote residents.

Over the past two years we have focused regional efforts on workforce development. A study by the UM Business and Economic Research Bureau, commissioned by OL, demonstrated that Northcentral Montana indicated that there are 30,000 workers in our region that are willing to seek training and commute for new or additional work.

When transportation was identified as a major barrier to the development of a regional workforce, we worked with tribal and municipalities to establish North Central Montana Transit (NCMT). In the first year of operation, NCMT transported over 18,000 riders over 179,291 miles across the Hi-Line from the Fort Belknap Indian and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation to the cities of Harlem, Chinook, Havre, Box Elder, Laredo and Great Falls. These riders utilized our services for medical, dental and vision appointments; including, surgical procedures, government services, education and to access employment opportunities.

Numerous community benefits are derived from providing the public transportation services. In rural areas, shortages in the numbers of health care providers and the lower population density, mean that families must travel longer distances to access health care. The Transit system has allowed residents to access necessary health care and stay in their communities.

The NCMT system serves as a model for new markets in alternative biofuels, advancing the awareness of locally produced biodiesel and its economic development potential. The diesel engine buses are powered by locally grown oilseed crops, crushed at Earl Firsher BioFuels in Chester and refined in the MSU-Northern Bio-energy Center in Havre. Through a partnership with Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railways and the Bio-Energy Center, Opportunity Link secured a Montana Department of Environmental Quality grant to document the feasibility of biodiesel use in railroad locomotive engines. Many economic development partners in the region hope that this demonstration will lead BNSF to contract with local producers for biodiesel production.

Clean air, clean water, healthy communities, and open spaces make Montana an attractive place to live and do business. It is essential that we focus on growing our economies to ensure that jobs are available now and for future generations. We have numerous opportunities available to us to create opportunities for economic growth and jobs for our future.

- Montana is blessed with its abundant wind, sun, and biomass resources. The renewable energy industry is already growing and creating jobs in our state, and there is tremendous opportunity for continued growth.
- State and federal incentives are important drivers of economic development and job creation. Laws like net metering, the Alternative Energy Loan Program, the Universal Systems Benefit program, and state and federal tax credits give Montanans an incentive to install renewable energy systems on their homes. It is the demand created by those programs that provide opportunities for businesses to grow and thrive. Government is not creating the jobs; it is creating an incentive for the private sector to create jobs.
- The Renewable Energy Standard is an important incentive to large and small businesses to invest in renewable energy.
- In addition to creating jobs, state and federal incentives for the installation of renewable energy systems save ratepayers money on their utility bills. Moreover, renewable energy systems that generate energy where it's used help avoid the need for costly upgrades to the transmission grid.
- Small renewable energy companies have been growing and hiring during the recession. State and federal incentives have helped to create stability in the renewable energy sector during a time of economic volatility.

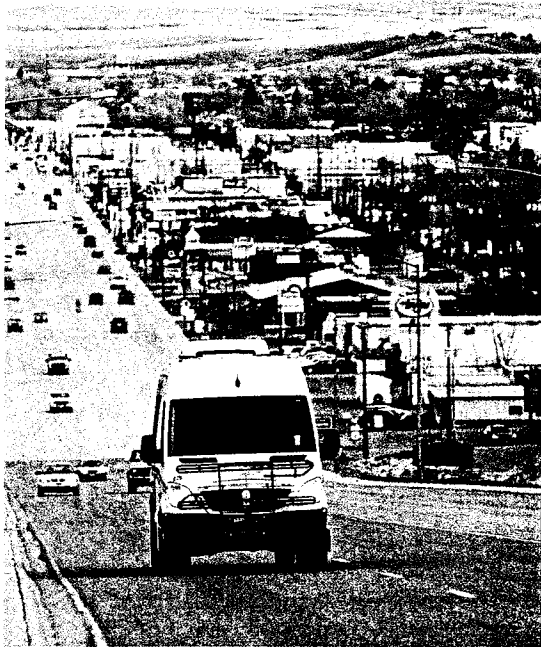
Over the next few months, legislators will be responsible for determining funding levels for business support, education, health care, social service, and other programs and services that depend on the on State funding to provide critical services. A better future for our families is dependent upon maintaining these vital services. Therefore, budget deliberations based upon a unilateral 5% decrease in these programs would be detrimental for the State and would greatly impact our ability to create jobs.

- **Limiting public services will limit business growth.** Our economic growth and the quality of public services are interconnected.
- **Keeping our economy moving depends on the quality of our public systems and structures.** Business growth is dependent upon energy, communications grids, transportation infrastructure, and workers that have received a high quality Montana education. Programs to provide business assistance are critical and should be complemented by programs that offer workforce training and development.
- **The key to creating jobs is investing in public structures.** We're not willing to hire graduates with poor education and training; we can't raise capital without quality infrastructure; and bringing everything together depends on roads, rail and other transportation. All of these depend on maintaining our public investments.

- **A balanced approach to our revenue problems is good for Montana, and good for business.** Keeping up our investments in public services is important for business growth, but to do that we need to find new revenue. Of course, some cuts will be necessary, but we need to find new revenue to maintain education, infrastructure and other services that support job creation.
- **Cutting public services will lead to lay-offs.** When the state scales back its revenue collections, it doesn't just lead to public employee lay-offs, it also creates a ripple effect that effects non-profits and businesses that have contracts with the state. Less revenue can also mean service providers and contractors have to lay-off employees.

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# linking vibrant



## HIGHLIGHTS & SUCCESSES

- ESTABLISHED FOUR NEW TRANSIT SYSTEMS IN REGION
- PILOTED USE OF MONTANA BIODIESEL IN TRANSIT FLEET
- SUPPORTED BY RIDERSHIP



## Growing our Regional Economy

Through Accessible Public Transportation in Northcentral Montana

Opportunity Link engaged a broad range of community stakeholders in Northcentral Montana, a region the size of the State of South Carolina in a regional planning process that identified transportation as a key ingredient to economic development and poverty reduction.

Opportunity Link and its planning partner, Western Transportation Institute, introduced strategies of collaboration and mutual support as a means to develop new public transit options. By establishing funding and service partnerships between

isolated rural communities, transits now successfully link residents of neighboring rural towns and three Indian reservations with metropolitan services over 100 miles away.

By coordinating contributions of local and tribal government agencies, private sector, social service organizations and educational institutions, Opportunity Link demonstrated an unprecedented ability to leverage private funds, local public funds, and federal funds for public transportation services in Northcentral Montana.

For more information, call (509) 265-3699 or visit [www.opportunitylinkmt.org](http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org)

Planning Leader:

**Opportunity Link**

*Uniting people. Linking resources. Fighting poverty.*

[www.opportunitylinkmt.org](http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org)

Planning Partner:



[www.westerntransportationinstitute.org](http://www.westerntransportationinstitute.org)

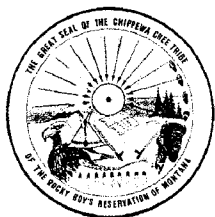
Planning Sponsor:



**Northwest Area Foundation**

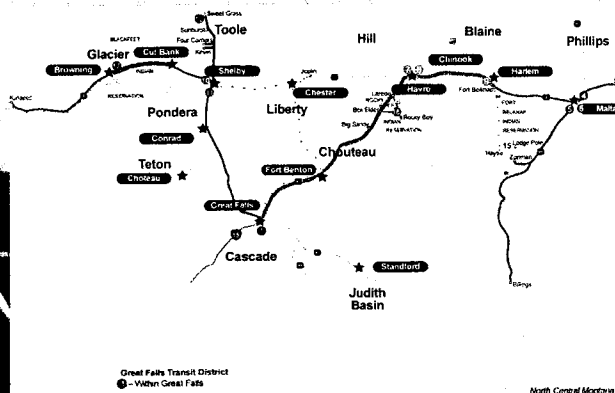
*Reducing Poverty. Building Prosperity.*

[www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org)



## Growing our Regional Economy Through Accessible Public Transportation

**Opportunity Link, Inc.**  
(406) 265-3699, [www.opportunitylinkmt.org](http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org)



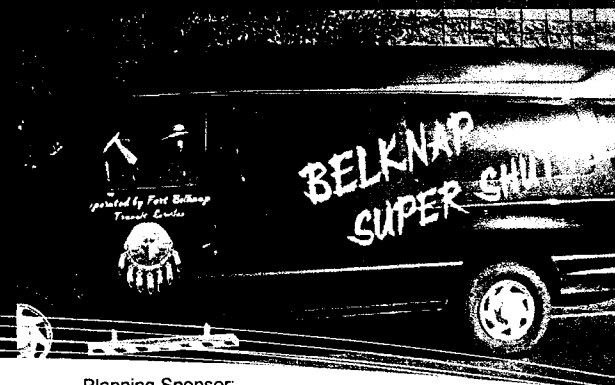
- Great Falls Transit District**  
 ① - Within Great Falls  
 Liberty County Transit (all rides only upon request)  
 - Chesser to Joplin  
 - Chesser to Shelby/Havre/Big Sandy/Great Falls  
 Phillips County Transit  
 ① - Mails to Saco (every Tuesday)  
 ② - Mails to Zortman (every other Thursday)  
 ③ - Mails to Glasgow/Havre/Great Falls/Bings (only upon request)  
 North Central Montana Regional Transit (or NCM Transit)  
 ① - Within Havre  
 ② - Havre to Great Falls  
 ③ - Fort Belknap to Rocky Boy and back with stops at Box Elder, Leland, Havre, Chinook, & Harlem  
 Northern Transit Interlocal  
 ① - Shelby to Kalspell with stops at Cut Bank and Browning  
 ② - Shelby, Conrad to Great Falls  
 Teton County Transit  
 ① - Sweet Grass to Shelby with stops at Sunburst, Kevin and Four Corners  
 Blackfeet Transit  
 ① - Within Blackfeet Reservation  
 ② - Browning to Kalspell via connection with NTI  
 Fort Belknap Transit  
 15 - Lapidary: Havre to Fort Belknap Agency  
 Rocky Boy Transit  
 ① - Within Rocky Boy Reservation  
 Glacier County Transit  
 ① - Browning to Cut Bank

### INCREASING OUR TRIBAL COMMUNITIES' ACCESS TO SERVICES

Regional transportation start-ups allow low-income, elderly, disabled, non-drivers, students, and employed commuters to get to school, work, medical appointments and commercial services. With transportation as a means to achieve tasks without relying on others, low-income individuals report feeling empowered and independent. Local shuttles and bus services build social capital through community ownership and pride.

In 2007, Opportunity Link convened a regional planning effort with technical assistance from Western Transportation Institute. This resulted in the establishment of four new transit systems in Northcentral Montana – among them are Fort Belknap Indian Community's Fort Belknap Transit System and the Chippewa Cree Tribe's Rocky Boy Transit. This also facilitated Blackfeet Nation's Blackfeet Transit to expand its services by coordinating routes with the Northern Transit Interlocal, a neighboring inter-city transit system.

In August 2009, Opportunity Link inaugurated the North Central Montana Transit's fixed-route bus services that offer daily, coordinated routes with Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Transit systems with the micropolitan hubs in the region.



Planning Leader:

**Opportunity Link**

Uniting people. Linking resources. Fighting poverty.

[www.opportunitylinkmt.org](http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org)

Planning Partner:



[www.westerntransportationinstitute.org](http://www.westerntransportationinstitute.org)

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# connectic



Opport Link's  
Quarterly  
Newsletter

## Project GreenBuild

*...is a hands-on construction training offered as a pre-apprenticeship program focused on integrating energy efficient materials, techniques and new technologies with standard skill sets.*

*...renovated Opportunity Link's North Central Montana Transit bus storage facility in Havre as an energy efficient training facility for the region.*

*...provided green construction training to individuals with basic carpentry training in two four-week training modules held from May to July 31<sup>st</sup> 2010.*

*...was offered by Opportunity Link, Inc. and Montana PEAKS, Inc. in cooperation with Stone Child College, Fort Belknap College, and other area colleges with funding from the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Family Economic Security Program.*

## A Greener Hi-Line *By Steven Eagle Feathers, Nation Builders*

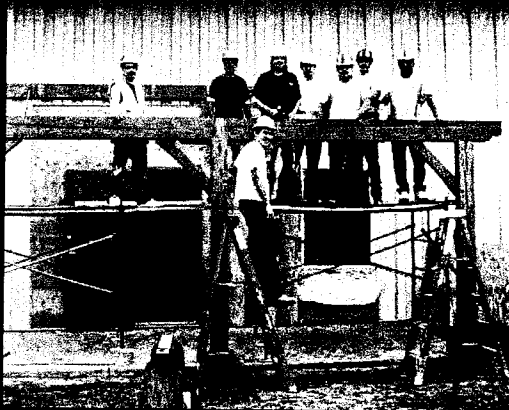
Opportunity Link's Project Green Build provided a unique opportunity to gain practical, hands-on experience while building a new green workforce in the region. The purpose of Project Green Build was to provide training for green construction in Northcentral Montana. All of us trainees are Native Americans from different tribal affiliations, ages and experience and together we called ourselves "Nation Builders." As Nation Builders, we were challenged to expand our views on the construction process and how it affects our community and environment. We were encouraged to join the green movement by implementing LEED guidelines.

LEED encompasses all aspects of the construction process and makes it friendly to the environment while at the same time making it very beneficial – both in terms of cost and energy, to occupants of the facilities. The most common misconception with building green is that it costs



# A Greener Hi-Line

(continued)



*Nation Builders working on the awning of the renovated bus facility in Havre, Montana using salvaged timber*

more than traditional building methods. A recent study conducted by Davis-Langdon show that green buildings cost little or nothing more than their counterparts. Taking into account the cost of heating and cooling a green vs. non-green building, green buildings can more than match their predecessors.

In the past, buildings – both residential and commercial – were constructed ignoring many important environmental issues. Today, with the onset of climate change, the green movement is taking big strides. LEED integrates new building ideas that include everything from where you build, how and what goes in and out of the building. LEED guidelines provide answers to all these questions in the most environment-friendly way. We were instructed to follow LEED guidelines and implemented the ideas into the renovation of the old Ford Holland building in Havre that housed Opportunity Link's North Central Montana Transit.

Our crew, led by Kirk Hammerquist, were taught skills that would prove valuable to anyone trying to make a career out of construction. We monitored the amount of materials recycled and

tried to use as much of the older, existing material into the building as possible to minimize and eliminate waste. Any material not used in the renovation was offered to the community.

Air quality was monitored as well as the chemicals being used (very little or no VOC's). The overall efficiency of the building was increased with the installation of solar panels, simple saver roof, a newer and more efficient hot water heater, increased insulation, efficient HVAC system, and T-5 energy efficient lighting. Also of equal importance is the fact that no habitat was sacrificed for construction. The training center was built from an underutilized part of the bus facility that was used mainly for storage.

The Nation Builders took time to give back to the community as well. The crew built a handicapped-accessible ramp for the St. Jonathan Paul's Mission in Hays located within the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Cost of materials was covered by the mission but the Nation Builders provided the labor for free. In addition, we also constructed a bus stop shelter for the neighborhood children from floor joists pulled out of the original facility. We had a strong sense of community. It was not required for us to show up for training everyday but everyone did not only show up but actively participated; thus living up to being Nation Builders.



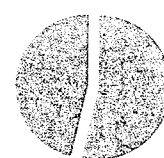
*Steven Eagle Feathers is a third year Computer Engineering student at Montana State University Northern in Havre*



## What we did to be GREEN

- **Recycled**
  - Re-used and re-purposed an existing building
  - Salvaged and re-used old materials
  - Used timber frame made from recycled wood
- **Mindful of indoor air quality**
  - Used reflective paint low in volatile organic compounds (VOC)
  - Maintained negative air pressure at work site
- **Increased energy efficiency of building**
  - Installed new energy efficient water heater
  - Installed energy efficient windows
  - Increased insulation to an r-value of r-30 in the roof (using simple saver technology) and r-28 in the walls
  - Use of natural and/or energy efficient lighting
  - Used solar energy technology
- **Managed storm water run-off**
- **Car-pooled**

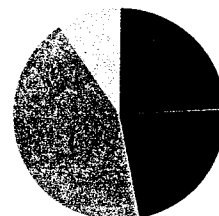
## Waste vs. Recycled



■ Total Waste  
7,040 lbs.

■ Total  
Recycled  
6,074 lbs.

### Recycled & re-used materials



■ Steel 1360 lbs.  
■ Copper 93 lbs.  
■ Aluminum 10 lbs.  
■ 2X4's & 2X6's 1348 lbs.  
■ Conduit 20 lbs.  
■ Shelving Units 2600 lbs.  
■ Firewood 578 lbs.



Project GreenBuild participants describe the work completed to staff of the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) during a tour of the renovated facility and completion ceremony held July 29<sup>th</sup> in Havre

## What is L.E.E.D.?

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (L.E.E.D.) is a rating system that is used for the certification process by the U.S. Green Building Council.

There are six categories that a green professional can follow to get a building LEED certified:

- Sustainable Sites
- Water Efficiency
- Energy & Atmosphere
- Materials & Resources
- Indoor Environmental Quality
- Innovation in Design



"For me, it was learning to think and live green. I got to meet people and get connected."



"If it wasn't for Project GreenBuild – the skills and work ethic I've learned, I would not have landed my job with a local construction company"

- Jacob Spang, Nation Builder and Carpenter, Wild Horse Ridge Construction



- Brad Shields, graphic design student at MSU Northern and artist/ designer of the Nation Builder logo



Former bus garage and storage facility that is now an energy efficient training facility for Opportunity Link's region of Northcentral Montana. Solar panels supply some of the facility's electrical requirements while increased insulation, simple saver roof, efficient hot water heater, HVAC, lighting and double-paned windows conserve energy. A pair of solar lamp posts provide light to the building's exterior.



## Message from Instructor Kirk Hammerquist

Having just completed three months of teaching and working on the GreenBuild project in Havre, I sincerely wish to thank all those who created and supported this opportunity. For me to teach and share my experience in the construction field with eight of the best students and one instructor is better than I could have asked for.

The program involved remodeling an old metal building that houses Opportunity Link's North Central Montana Transit. We converted the front third of the building into a workable training center so future classes have a place to learn and open doors to their potential.

Our emphasis was on viewing the construction process as an opportunity to build Green. Green meaning a chance to see how, with thought, we could change some old attitudes regarding recycling. We found innovative ways to reuse old materials, add green-friendly insulation, use equipment efficiently for conservative building practices and ultimately, create a minimal impact on our environmental future.

So a special thanks to the students, Tom Roasting Stick, Seth Alcorn, Brad Shields, James Flying, Jacob Spang, Everett Antoine III, Steve Eagle Feathers and William Decelles for sticking with me and completing the training.

Also to fellow instructor and participant Robert Kittson, who without his help, I would have only been a crazy man talking too fast!

Without the grant from the Family Economic Security Program, Montana PEAKS and Opportunity Link, this project could not have happened. So, thank you, Mary Danford and Barb Stiffarm, Rocky Boy, Fort Belknap, Havre, and all three local colleges because the chance to work with such great people doesn't roll around very often!



*Kirk Hammerquist operates a general contracting firm, Hammerquist & Casalegno that recently completed construction of the DNRC-DEQ facility in Kalispell, meeting the highest level for L.E.E.D. certification. Kirk also serves on Montana's State Workforce Investment Board.*



*Nation Builders with instructor Kirk Hammerquist during the completion ceremony held July 29<sup>th</sup> in Havre.*

### For more information on Project GreenBuild, contact:

Barbara Stiffarm, Executive Director  
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(406) 265-3699 or toll-free (877) 332-3699

**Project  
GreenBuild**



### Project GreenBuild Partners



North Central Montana





## BNSF Railway in Havre now Runnin' on Montana Biodiesel



*U.S. Senator Jon Tester, Opportunity Link executive director Barb Stiffarm and project partners BNSF, MSU Northern Bio-Energy Center, Bear Paw Development and Earl-Fisher BioFuels, celebrate BNSF's initial use of Montana biodiesel July 17<sup>th</sup> in Havre*

U.S. Senator Jon Tester joined the celebratory kick-off ceremony by BNSF Railways and partners July 17<sup>th</sup> in Havre. The event marked BNSF's use of a 20% biodiesel blend in its switch engine for one year to pilot the use of locally produced biodiesel and demonstrating improved fuel performance, consumption, emissions, and conformity to standards. Biodiesel performance will be compared with that of another designated switch engine using regular diesel fuel. Both switch engines will be based in BNSF's Havre Diesel Shop but will be used in regular runs throughout the year including during

continued on page 2

## US Department of Transportation recognize OppLink for Transit Planning

This year's Transportation Excellence Planning Awards recognized Opportunity Link for its work in successfully establishing and coordinating public transit services in Northcentral Montana. Opportunity Link was nominated for and was awarded the Planning & Leadership category and was also awarded the Tribal Transportation Planning category.

Opportunity Link's North Central Montana Transit director Jim Lyons accepted the award on behalf of Opportunity Link during the awards ceremony in Minneapolis last July 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (TPEA) is a biennial

awards program developed by the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and



*NCMT director Jim Lyons with office of planning directors from FTA and FHWA Charles Goodman and James Cheatham respectively in an awards ceremony in Minneapolis June 11<sup>th</sup>*

continued on page 2

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Established in 2004, Opportunity Link is a non-profit organization that creates and implements long-term solutions and encourages partnerships that will build prosperity in the Northcentral region of Montana. Opportunity Link devotes its resources to promoting public-private sector collaborations to develop systemic solutions. Opportunity Link, Inc. was established in partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation ([www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org)) which is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long-term. For more information, visit

[www.opportunitylinkmt.org](http://www.opportunitylinkmt.org)

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## 2010 Transportation Planning Excellence Award Winners

### Transportation and Land Use Integration

Capital District  
Transportation Committee,  
Albany, New York

### Safety Planning

Cheyenne Metropolitan  
Planning Organization,  
Wyoming

### Modeling and Technology Applications

Georgia Department of  
Transportation

### Transportation Planning and Environment

Florida Department of  
Transportation

### Modeling and Technology Applications

Florida Department of  
Transportation

### Freight Planning, Planning Leadership, and Public Involvement and Outreach

Minnesota Department of  
Transportation

### Livability/Sustainability

New York City Department  
of Transportation, New  
York

### Freight Planning and Safety Planning

North Jersey  
Transportation Planning  
Authority, New Jersey

### Planning Leadership and Tribal Transportation Planning

Opportunity Link, Inc.,  
Montana

### Livability/Sustainability and Public Involvement and Outreach

City of Salem, Oregon

### Livability/Sustainability

City of San Jose, California

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/index.htm>

## BNSF runnin' on biodiesel (continued from page 1)

# RUNNIN' ON MONTANA BIODIESEL

BNSF  
RAILWAY

Bio-Energy Center

Beau Price Development Corporation

OPPORTUNITY LINK

Opportunity Link

severe winter weather conditions.

The biodiesel used is produced locally by Earl-Fisher BioFuels in Chester (refer to page 9) and tested by Montana State University Northern's Bio-Energy Center.

BNSF Railways' Havre Diesel Shop alone consumes approximately 30 million gallons of diesel every year. Should the technical and economic aspects of biodiesel use meet the railway industry's technical and business needs, an increased demand for local production of biodiesel fuel is possible and could boost economic development not only in Montana but throughout the United States.

Opportunity Link will be working to increase awareness of producers and growers in Northcentral Montana on the

potential for development of a sustainable local biodiesel industry in Montana.

The project is a result of an ongoing partnership between BNSF, MSU Northern's Bio-Energy Center, Opportunity Link, Bear Paw Development Corporation, and Earl Fisher Biofuels with support from Montana Department of Agriculture's Growth Through Agriculture Program and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Alternative Energy Development Program through a recent grant awarded to Opportunity Link, Inc.

For more information, please contact project partners Beau Price at [beau.price@bnsf.com](mailto:beau.price@bnsf.com), Greg Kegel at [kegel@msun.edu](mailto:kegel@msun.edu), or Barbara Stiffarm at [bstiffarm@opportunitylinkmt.org](mailto:bstiffarm@opportunitylinkmt.org).

## Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (continued from page 1)

The Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (TPEA) is a biennial awards program developed by the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation and co-sponsored by the American Planning Association. They recognize outstanding initiatives across the country to develop, plan, and implement innovative transportation planning practices.

Among 80 projects that were nominated, they identified 11 Award Winning projects and 11 were recognized with Honorable Mentions (refer to side panel for a complete list of winners). Nominations were evaluated following the criteria: community and public involvement; equity; implementation; innovation; intermodalism; livability/sustainability; and partnerships and collaboration.

For more information, visit the website at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/).

The board and staff of Opportunity Link, Inc.  
and the North Central Montana Transit  
recognize our planning partner

**M**  
**MONTANA**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Western Transportation  
Institute

our planning sponsor



**Northwest Area  
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and all of our community partners in the  
planning process for their assistance and  
generous support.

**Thank you very much!**

## Opportunity Link is moving ahead

*Karen Thomas, Board Member, Opportunity Link*

We are proud of what Opportunity Link has achieved over the last three years. As a board member, I can say that Opportunity Link fulfilled what they set out to achieve while keeping true to its principles and strategic directions set by the communities of Northcentral Montana almost eight years ago. For its work on transportation, Opportunity Link not only established four new transit systems but continues to receive recognition – two national awards and an international commendation – for its accomplishments.

I believe this can be attributed to Opportunity Link's dedicated staff, supportive board, network of partners and resources, and by having a three-year workplan that helped guide, direct and assess all of their efforts. This quarter, the board of directors and staff worked to identify action strategies and priorities for guiding our work in the next five years. Opportunity Link's 2011-2015 workplan will be focused on economic development, asset and wealth creation, transportation and health.

The board of directors and staff continue to take advantage of

opportunities to learn from existing best practices and innovative projects in developing the organizational work plan while remaining connected to our original plan. This includes research, networking and information-sharing events focused on rural communities such as Northwest Area Foundation's Grassroots and Groundworks and this year's Rural Community Conference.

We are confident that Opportunity Link will continue its good work in the region. They can be assured of my support and hopefully of your support as well.



*R-L: Karen Thomas with OppLink board member Randy Barrett, Northwest Area Foundation president Kevin Walker and OppLink executive director Barb Stiffarm*

## Opportunity Link in National Roundtable

Opportunity Link executive director Barbara Stiffarm was invited to join a national roundtable discussion on "Keeping Kids Moving: How Equitable Transportation Policy Can Prevent Childhood Obesity." The roundtable was held July 15<sup>th</sup> at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Over 300 individuals attended the meeting with over 500 more viewers on its live webcast.

Other featured speakers include Martha Coven, Special Assistant to the President, Domestic Security Council,

Roy Kienitz, Undersecretary for Policy, US Department of Transportation, Dr. Howard Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health, US Department of Health and Human Services, among others.

The national roundtable was organized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity, Convergence Partnership, Transportation for America and Policy Link.

To view the webinar recording, visit <http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/keepingkidsmoving>

## Keeping Kids Moving

How Equitable Transportation Policy Can Prevent Childhood Obesity



## OPPORTUNITY LINK

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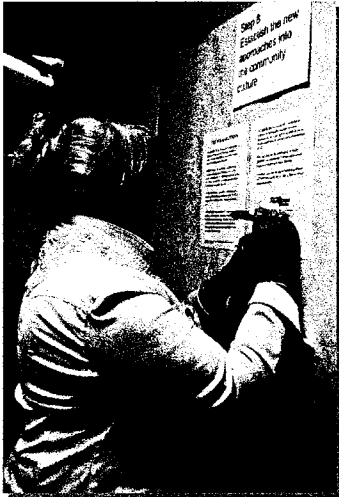
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Steven Eagle Feathers

### NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA TRANSIT

Jim Lyons  
Rana Weber  
Bruce James  
Randy Graves  
Jim Leeds  
Bob Waldron  
Chandler Salmon

**Providing sustainable public transportation throughout the region with services that are safe, accessible, affordable, reliable, efficient, and clean for all**



Phillips County Transit Authority coordinator Betty Hasler signs her support during the proclamation ceremony

## North Central Montana



### First Year Highlights

Ridership up to 1,600 monthly

Use of 5 to 20% biodiesel blend in buses

Through Opportunity Link,

- recognized by FTA & FHWA 2010 Transportation Planning Excellence Awards
- received a commendation from the International Association of Public Transportation (UITP)
- selected for the 2010 Accessible Transportation Coalitions Initiative by Easter Seals Project ACTION

[www.ncmtransit.org](http://www.ncmtransit.org)

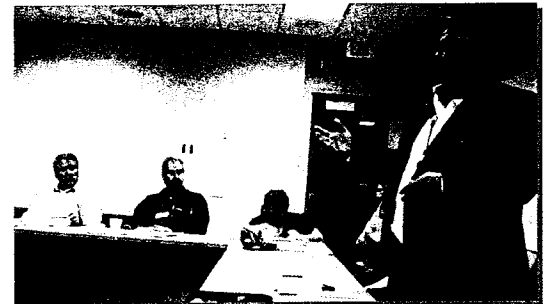
## Accessible Transportation Initiative develops shared vision, action plans for Northcentral Montana

Representatives from all ten public transportation systems in Northcentral Montana joined State agency representatives and other transportation stakeholders in a 2-day networking and plan development session facilitated by Easter Seals Project ACTION June 9 & 10.

The group formulated a vision for the region and prioritized sustainability of existing services, partnerships and safety as its primary focus for action. Montana Department of Transportation Director Jim Lynch and Department of Public Health and Human Services Anna Whiting Sorrell opened the meeting. Both voiced their overwhelming support to transportation systems that link people through the sparsely populated region to services and each other. Director Lynch stressed the importance of working together and said that a goal of a coalition of transit systems should be to provide linked lines that would enable people to travel from community to community. He added, "Having both directors of two agencies working together



Directors Jim Lynch and Anna Whiting Sorrell with agency representatives Tom Stuber and Patrick Sanders (above); Fort Belknap Transit director John Healy explains importance of safety to other transit managers (below) during the meeting.



is first in the country and is historic at best."

## North Central Montana Transit celebrates first year of service

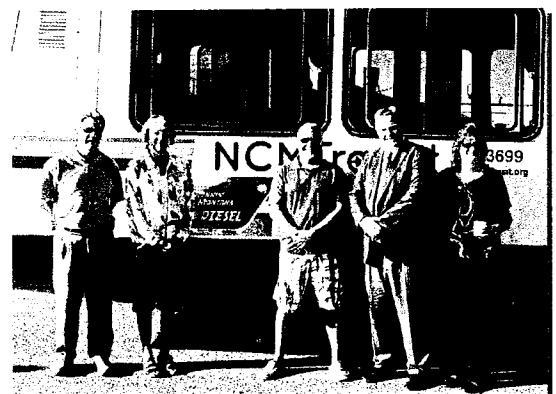
Contributed by Jim Lyons, Director, North Central Montana Transit

North Central Montana Transit celebrated its first year of operations last August 24<sup>th</sup>. This first year we have provided 18,136 rides – equivalent almost to the entire population of Hill and Blaine Counties. Initially projected at 250 to 300 monthly, our current ridership averages 1,600 since the start of 2010.

What we are most proud of is our safe and reliable service where we were able to transport all riders to their destinations with no accidents while operating all of the service days. It is this trusting relationship and mutual respect between our passengers and drivers that pushes us to serve them better.

For more information or to keep updated, join our [Facebook page](#), visit our website at

[www.ncmtransit.org](http://www.ncmtransit.org) or call (406) 265-3699.



U.S. Senator Jon Tester proudly supports NCMT's use of Montana biodiesel in its buses. L-R: Hill County commissioner Mike Anderson, Opportunity Link executive director Barbara Stiffam, NCMT director Jim Lyons, Senator Jon Tester, NCMT operator Rana Weber

## Opportunity Link expands regional employment training

*New curriculum addresses young Native American job seekers*

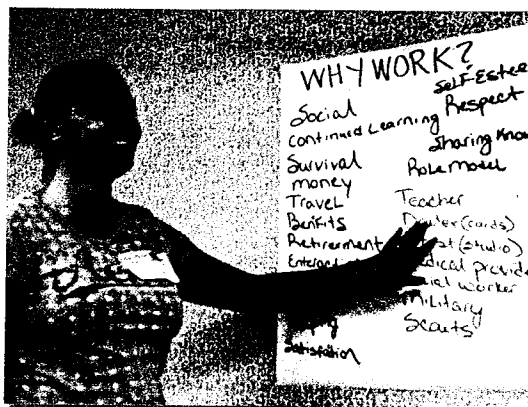
Opportunity Link is expanding regional *Workin' It Out* soft skills employment training this year by offering a curriculum written specifically for Native American entry-level job seekers. "Soft skills" refer to unspoken rules of the workplace such as employment etiquette, effective communication, and problem solving.

Opportunity Link currently offers the 12-hour *Workin' It Out* program in more than twenty North Central Montana high schools, youth facilities, tribal colleges, TANF programs, Job Service offices, youth detention programs, and a regional prison. Since 2006, more than 1,000 students, entry-level workers, at-risk youth and ex-offenders have completed the training.

Opportunity Link recruited Dr. Steve Parese, Ph.D. Ed., nationally recognized author of the *Workin' It Out* series, to develop an additional curriculum for use in North Central Montana. In April 2010, Dr. Parese met in Havre with a team of employment specialists from Blackfeet Manpower, Fort Belknap Employment Services, and Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF. The group suggested adaptations, and Dr. Parese rewrote the course's scenarios and exercises to reflect people, places and situations often encountered by job applicants on rural reservations.

In June additional *Workin' It Out* facilitators and graduates joined the editing group to test the new curriculum's first draft. Some sections were rewritten to better represent community and family beliefs and relationships. Each chapter was introduced with a quote from a Native American leader.

The course is tentatively titled *Workin' With Tradition*, and will be piloted in four training sites this fall. Feedback from instructors and students will be



Arianne, workshop participant, shares reasons why people seek work as part of a group activity during the first *Workin' with Tradition* workshop in Havre July 14-16

incorporated into Parese's final version, to be released in Spring 2011.

"*Workin' It Out* introduces young people to employers' expectations of professionalism, dependability, and courtesy," says Elaine Top Sky, director of Chippewa-Cree Tribal TANF. "Young Native American workers may encounter racism, and they may be intimidated entering unfamiliar communities and worksites. We are trying to help them deal with new situations, which might be very different from their previous experiences."

Opportunity Link will offer the curriculum throughout the region within a year. It may also be used by other job training programs in the state this year. "Local employers encouraged us on this project," says Barb Stiffarm, Opportunity Link executive director, "They saw a need for training to help our Native American youth be more successful in finding and retaining jobs."

For more information on *Workin' With Tradition*, please e-mail Day Soriano, Opportunity Link development director at [dsoriano@opportunitylinkmt.org](mailto:dsoriano@opportunitylinkmt.org) or call (406) 265-3699.

**To schedule or participate in *Workin' With Tradition* or in other *Workin' It Out* program series, please contact Star Perkins, community development officer, at (406) 265-3699 or e-mail [sp Perkins@opportunitylinkmt.org](mailto:sp Perkins@opportunitylinkmt.org)**

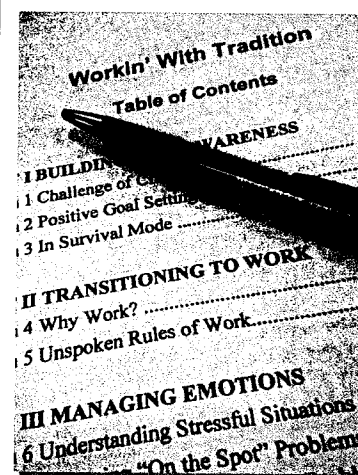
### Workin' It Out

**WHO?**  
New or dislocated workers unfamiliar with the unspoken rules of the workplace.

**WHY?**  
Many of today's entry-level workers, especially those raised in disadvantaged areas, seem to lack basic interpersonal skills. The common-sense expectations of many employers may be foreign to those with little experience in the workforce.

**WHAT?** WIO has ten interactive 90-minute lessons. Participants come to better understand employers' expectations, and learn simple but practical skills for communicating and resolving workplace problems.

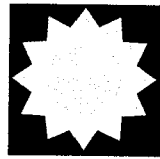
[www.workinitout.com](http://www.workinitout.com)



*Workin' With Tradition* is designed to help Native American job-seekers of Northcentral Montana improve self-esteem while developing self-awareness and interpersonal "soft-skills" needed to successfully enter into and advance in the world of work

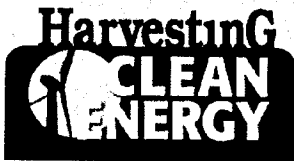


*Workin' It Out* facilitators and members of the curriculum development team co-teaching *Workin' with Tradition* with series author Steve Parese in Havre



**NCAT**

[www.ncat.org](http://www.ncat.org)



[www.harvestcleanenergy.org](http://www.harvestcleanenergy.org)



Committed to the future of rural communities.

[www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt/](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt/)



Governor Brian Schweitzer with NCAT staff and 2009-2010 Energy Corps members during an energy training in Helena



Curtis Windy Boy, 2009-2010 Energy Corps member with Fort Belknap Indian Community learn of biodiesel at the Harvesting Clean Energy Conference in Seattle

## Workshops for clean energy funding set in Havre

*Contributed by Al Kurki, Program Specialist, National Center for Appropriate Technology*

This fall and winter Montana farmers, ranchers, and small businesses – along with agency and non-profit staff and private grant writers – will be able to learn more about how to tap renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities for rural Montana. Starting November 16 and 17, MSU-Northern in Havre will host the first two "Tapping Clean Energy Funding for Rural Montana" workshops.

The workshops will outline what loans, rebates, and grants are available in energy efficiency and renewable energy for farmers, ranchers and small town businesses. The workshops will include a specific focus on the USDA-RD's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant and loan program.

People who attend these workshops will gain a better understanding of utility, state and federal rebate, loan and grant programs for energy efficiency and

renewable energy development.

Clean Energy Funding workshop participants will receive educational materials and sample applications that can be used with REAP and other loan/grant applications. The Havre sessions are the first in a series of Clean Energy Funding workshops and webinars that will be offered around the state over the winter months.

These November workshops are sponsored by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) along with Harvesting Clean Energy, Opportunity Link, Montana Food and Ag Development Centers, MSU-Northern, Montana Economic Developers Association and the Montana Department of Agriculture, in partnership with USDA Rural Development in Montana.

For more details on registering for either of these workshops, contact Al Kurki at (406) 449-0104 or e-mail [akurki@ncat.org](mailto:akurki@ncat.org).

## Energy conservation on the ground

*Contributed by Holly Hill, Energy Corps AmeriCorps Program Director, NCAT*

Over the last 10 months, Montana Energy Corps AmeriCorps members have provided valuable energy services to individuals and communities throughout North Central Montana. Energy Corps members in Havre, Rocky Boy, Fort Belknap and Browning have installed weatherization materials in homes, organized community energy workshops, performed tribal building energy assessments, produced biodiesel to be used in the North Central Montana Transit buses, and educated countless numbers of community members on using energy more efficiently. The first round of Energy Corps members completed their AmeriCorps terms at the end of August. We'd like to extend our thanks for the extraordinary service and accomplishments of our dedicated team!

Due to the continued need for community energy services and the success demonstrated in the first year, the Montana Energy Corps program has been

awarded funding to increase the number of Energy Corps members from 10 to 15 across the state during the second year of operation. Additionally, the Energy Corps program has received a national grant to expand services to Arkansas, Iowa and Pennsylvania. The program is currently accepting applications for the next round of Energy Corps members beginning this fall. Please contact Holly Hill at (406) 494-4572 or [hollyh@ncat.org](mailto:hollyh@ncat.org) for further information.

The Energy Corps is an initiative of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) in partnership with Opportunity Link and the Corporation for National and Community Service that was created to address unmet community energy needs by promoting sustainable energy consumption and education, fostering community sustainability and helping to mitigate the effects of global climate change.

*Opportunity Link is proud to be an integral part of a project that was able to demonstrate such a high level of success for replication!*



## YouthBuild of North Central Montana

*Contributed by Robert Anderson, Director, YouthBuild North Central Montana*

On June 25<sup>th</sup> YouthBuild of North Central Montana held its first graduation ceremony. 17 trainees participated in the cap and gown ceremony. The 2009/2010 trainees framed, sided and roofed two homes for the Chippewa Cree Housing Authority. One was built at the Montana State University Northern campus and transported to the reservation and the other was built on site. During the construction process, the trainees learned skills in carpentry, plumbing, and residential wiring while they worked on attaining GED's and lifelong living skills.

YouthBuild started this year's first session August 9<sup>th</sup> with another session scheduled to begin January 10, 2011. Each session is planned for 20 students and will last for 20 weeks. The trainees will spend part of each day working on attaining academic goals and a portion working in the construction lab or job-site. This year the program has partnered with District IV HRDC's Mutual Self Help Housing program

to frame homes for the participating families. Building on the successes of last year, trainees will again focus on goal setting, improving employability skills, interpersonal skills, job safety, and the importance of being involved in the community.

Youth Build is designed to help young people between the ages of 16 and 24 to build their lives while they learn to build a home. Traditional schooling has failed for most of the students who enter the program. The focus of the program is on the YOU in Youth Build and helping the students make the most of the opportunity that is presented. Their days are structured and filled with learning and hands-on construction activities. At the end of each day they get to stand back and see what progress they have made and actually see how their work have helped to build someone's dream.

For more information or to apply, contact Bob Anderson at (406) 265-3747, via e-mail to [robert.anderson21@msun.edu](mailto:robert.anderson21@msun.edu) or visit the website at [www.msun.edu/youthbuild](http://www.msun.edu/youthbuild).

## PARTNER IN FOCUS: Earl Fisher Biofuels

### Developing sustainable energy solutions in the region

*Contributed by Logan Fisher, Partner, Earl Fisher Biofuels*

If you can grow your own diesel fuel, you don't need to buy it from someone else.

Earl Fisher Biofuels, a partnership between two fourth generation Montana farmers Brett Earl and Logan Fisher, was started to create economic growth and employment opportunities by building a biodiesel production facility in Chester. The vision is that this will, in turn, create a self-sustaining industry by creating a market for oilseed crops that can be grown locally, converted to fuel locally, and consumed locally.

Earl Fisher Biofuels produces ASTM 6571 Certified B100 biodiesel made from a variety of Montana grown oilseeds such as safflower, canola and camelina.

Last July 1<sup>st</sup>, Earl Fisher delivered its first shipment of biodiesel to BNSF's Havre Diesel Shop. Earl Fisher Biofuels will be supplying BNSF with 20,000 gallons of

biodiesel – equivalent to 1,600 gallons a month – for the duration of the project.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.earlfisherbiofuels.com](http://www.earlfisherbiofuels.com), call (406) 759-5018 or send an e-mail to [logan@earlfisherbiofuels.com](mailto:logan@earlfisherbiofuels.com).



*Partners Brett Earl and Logan Fisher pressing oilseeds to produce biodiesel in their Chester facility to show visiting Stone Child College students and faculty*

LEARN. BUILD. GROW.

**YOUTH  
BUILD**  
North Central Montana



*YouthBuild participants built and completed two homes as part of the 2009-2010 program*



*If from the demonstration project (refer to page 1) BNSF chooses to use a 5% biodiesel blend in their Havre Diesel Shop*



*An estimated 1.75 million gallons per year of biodiesel will need to be produced*



*That consumes 875,000 to 1,000,000 bushels of oilseed (oil yield of 2 gallons/bushel) grown on 43,750 to 50,000 acres (yield of 1,000 lbs/acre)*



*A source of income and alternative market for 50 to 150 farmers in the region!*





Warren Bell Trucking, owned by Warren Bell of Fort Belknap, was the recipient of a \$7,000 Indian Equity Fund grant in 2009

#### CONTACT US

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[www.ncmtransit.org](http://www.ncmtransit.org)



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## 2011 Indian Equity Fund applications open

The Montana Department of Commerce's 2011 Indian Equity Fund is now accepting applications from small business owners and entrepreneurs around the state. The Indian Equity Fund is a grant open to enrolled members of Montana Tribes. Two recipients from each of the tribes may receive up to \$7,000 each to fund either a business start-up or to expand their existing business. Applications for the grant are due on

December 6. Opportunity Link will be offering workshops in Rocky Boy and Fort Belknap on October 13 & 14 to assist interested business owners in completing business plans as part of their applications.

For more information or to apply, contact Philip Belangie, entrepreneur development program manager, Montana Department of Commerce at (406) 721-3663, e-mail [pbelangie@mt.gov](mailto:pbelangie@mt.gov) or visit [www.entrepreneur.mt.gov](http://www.entrepreneur.mt.gov).

#### Upcoming Events in and around the Region

- *2010 Fall Transit Management Workshops*, Montana Department of Transportation, October 13 & 14, Gateway Center, Helena and October 19 to 21, Hilton Garden Inn, Billings
- *Tax Telecourses*, Montana Credit Unions for Community Development, beginning October 19, [www.MontanaFreeFile.org](http://www.MontanaFreeFile.org) or call 1-800-755-5446 extension 142
- *Agricultural Biofuel Summit*, Ethanol Producers and Consumers (EPAC), October 19 & 20, Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Forum on Expanding the U.S. Biofuels Market*, USDA, Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Perennial Roots: Reimagining our Energy and Agriculture Future*, Alternative Energy Resources Organization 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, October 22 to 24, Lewis & Clark County Fairgrounds, Helena
- *Tapping Clean Energy Funding for Rural Montana*, November 16 (Agency, Non-profit & Grantwriters' workshop) & November 17 (Small Town Businesses, Farmers & Ranchers' workshop), Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Paying for the Recession*, 2011 Economic Outlook Seminar, January 26, 2011, Hilton Garden Inn, Great Falls

#### Opportunity Link, Inc.

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